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WOOD IF THEY COULD

Designers are finding fresh ways to add it, and warmth, to bathrooms, while retaining a thoroughly modern aesthetic.

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ONE are the days of the sterile all-white bath.

“I didn’t want white-on-white with splashes of gray for our master bath,” said Meredith Andrews, who hired architectural designer Mary McKee to create a modern master suite addition for the 1930-era Colonial that she shares with her family in Newton. “I wanted something totally different — a master bath with a spa-like feel where I could escape from everyday life.”

Earlier this month, Houzz, a popular home renovation and design site that connects homeowners and home professionals, released the results of its annual bathroom trends study. Out of the 1,360 US homeowners the site surveyed about their recent or planned master bathroom renovations, 45 percent reported that the bathroom is a place where they relax.

Andrews, who said the master bath was the one room in the house for which she had a clear vision, was inspired by a Malibu beach hotel. To create their sanctuary, McKee incorporated custom teak elements, including a handcrafted floating vanity, against a crisp white backdrop. “There’s a real richness in the color and the streaking,” McKee said. She, like many designers, finds herself using more and more wood as a way to warm up baths, which are inherently hard and cold given all the porcelain, metal, and mirror. “People are drawn to its warmth,” she said. “You see a lot of natural wood at spa retreats.”

The all-wood look has roots in Scandinavia, as well as Japan. Architect Deborah Baskin lines entire shower enclosures in wood-effect porcelain tile planks in a vertical orientation. “It’s definitely Japanese-inspired,” Baskin said. In a master bathroom for a couple who relocated to the area from Finland, designer Vered Rosen installed wood-effect porcelain tile planks on the floor and used it horizontally to create an accent wall behind the tub. “The client wanted a blend



“Showrooms are asking for reclaimed wood, rustic wood, and driftwood, different names for the same look,” said Peter Ollestad, vice president of sales at Strasser Woodenworks. “Over the past few years, the trend has been white and gray over and over again, but it’s swinging back to natural materials again.” Pictured is a bath vanity by Strasser Woodenworks in their new “Dusky Oak” finish. “Similar to the ageless beauty of reclaimed wood from old barns, factories, and warehouses, Dusky Oak injects a rich sense of character into the bath,” Ollestad said. —Bob Vinton

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of Scandinavian and Japanese design,” she said. “It’s very soothing.”

Bath showrooms are noticing the shift to more organic styles. “We still sell tons of white — it’s been white Shaker vanities all day long — but wood categories are growing,” said Jason Sevinor, owner and president of Designer Bath and Salem Plumbing Supply in Watertown and Beverly. “The warmer finishes like walnut and gray stains have become quite popular.”

Manufacturers are responding. In July, Strasser Woodenworks, which makes wood vanities popular in New England, introduced a finish called “Dusky Oak,” which resembles reclaimed wood. Peter Ollestad, vice president of sales, notes that those with a contemporary aesthetic are pairing it with minimalist hardware, while those who lean traditional love it with rugged wrought iron. “The vanity can go either way depending on how you accessorize it,” Ollestad said.

Vanities, shelves, and flooring aren’t the only ways to add wood to a bath. Sevinor points to wood accents on cabinet hardware and plumbing fixtures, as well as mahogany toilet seats. “The seats knock people’s socks off,” he said. “What more could you want?”